

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 01595 181555Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USSS-00 /026 W
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O 181525Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9972

S E C R E T BOGOTA 1595

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ASEC, PINS, CASC, CO
SUBJ: KIDNAPPING OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER: SITREP 11

1. AMBASSADOR MET WITH GENERAL MONTANEZ, CHIEF OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE (AND OUR LIAISON AT DEFENSE MINISTRY) AND COLONEL URIBE CHIEF OF INTERNAL INTELLIGENCE, FEB 17.

2. AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED HIS THANKS FOR COOPERATION WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING FROM COLOMBIAN AUTHORITIES. HE REITERATED THE HIGH-LEVEL USG CONCERN THAT IS FELT IN THIS CASE AND EXPLAINED THE HIGH ESTIMATION WHICH THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE FOR THE PEACE CORPS, POINTING OUT THAT PRESIDENT CARTER'S MOTHER HAD BEEN A VOLUNTEER. AMBASSADOR DESCRIBED STARR'S WORK AND ASSIGNMENT TO THE GENERAL, STRESSING THAT IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH POLITICAL CAUSES.

3. AMBASSADOR INFORMED MONTANEZ THAT STARR'S MOTHER WAS CONSIDERING COMING TO BOGOTA AND THAT WE WERE TRYING TO DISSUADE HER. HER PRESENCE HERE WOULD BECOME KNOWN QUICKLY AND WOULD IMPLY THAT NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE KIDNAPPERS HAD STARTED. THEN, IF THESE WERE PERCEIVED TO HAVE BEEN BROKEN OFF THE EFFECT COULD BE DISASTROUS. GENERAL MONTANEZ AGREED WITH THE AMBASSADOR'S POSITION THAT A TRIP BY THE MOTHER OR OTHER RELATIVES WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE.

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4. AMBASSADOR REVIEWED STARR'S STATE OF HEALTH AND POINTED OUT THAT THIS WAS A CRITICAL FACTOR. HE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT HIS WEAK PHYSICAL CONDITION COULD BECOME A BURDEN ON A FORCED MARCH, POSSIBLY COMPELLING THE GUERRILLAS TO ABANDON HIM TO THE ELEMENTS. TO THIS THE GENERAL REPLIED: "OUR CUMULATIVE EXPERIENCE TELLS US THEY WON'T DO THAT. THEY WILL CONSTRUCT A LITTER

OR A CHAIR AND TAKEN HIM. THEY CAN'T AFFORD TO LEAVE HIM. I DO NOT FEEL THAT HIS LIFE IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER FOR THAT REASON."

5. GENERAL MONTANEZ SAID HE FELT IT WOULD BE SOME TIME BEFORE WE RECEIVED ANY CONTACT AND THAT PROBABLY THE NEXT CONTACT WOULD BE WITH THE AMERICAN EMBASSY. HE STATED THAT, UNFORTUNATELY, ACCORDING TO HIS REPORTS, YOUNG STARR--WHEN ASKED WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIM--RESPONDED "THE AMERICAN EMBASSY". THE GUERRILLAS APPARENTLY THINK THEY "WON A LOTTERY". THE GENERAL SAID THAT ELEMENTS OF THE 3RD (CALI), 9TH (NEIVA) AND 7TH (VILLAVICENCIO) BRIGADES WERE NOT OPERATING IN THE AREA, CAUTIOUSLY AND IN SMALL GROUPS. MONTANEZ FELT THAT A LARGE MILITARY PUSH COULD BE DISASTEROUS OR AT LEAST FUTILE. THE GENERAL FELT THAT STARR'S STATE OF HEALTH COULD HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE GUERRILLA'S OPERATIONS. GENERAL MONTANEZ AND COLONEL URIBE REITERATED THAT THEY DID NOT FEEL THAT STARR'S LIFE WAS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER, BECAUSE HE WAS TOO VALUABLE AS A POSSIBLE "SOURCE OF INCOME" AND BECAUSE THEY THINK THE GUERRILLAS COULD NOT AFFORD TO BE PERCEIVED TO HAVE WANTONLY MURDERED SOME INNOCENT YOUNGSTER.

6. AT THE END OF THE MEETING IT WAS AGREED THAT THE AMBASSADOR AND GENERAL WOULD SHARE WITH EACH OTHER ALL INFORMATION RECEIVED AND WE HAVE ALREADY GIVEN THE GENERAL THE SUBSTANCE OF THE REPORT WE RECEIVED FROM JUDGE PADILLA (SITREP 9).

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SANCHEZ

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